

REPUBLICANS PLAYING THE ROLE OF GRINCH

(Mr. PALLONE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, the role of the Grinch this year is being played by House Republicans. Rather than spreading holiday cheer this month, House Republicans have done their best to make life more difficult for millions of Americans.

House Republicans want to force college students to pay an additional \$5,200 in college loans. House Republicans plan to take away school lunches from thousands of school children who desperately need the nutritional value that these lunches provide. House Republicans are willing to cut the home heating assistance program for low-income families just before the long winter season. And House Republicans plan to penalize America's seniors who don't sign up for a prescription drug plan before May 15, despite all the confusing information that is coming out of the Bush administration.

Mr. Speaker, it is time House Republicans changed their ways, because nobody wants to be around the Grinch in December.

MEDICARE INFORMED CHOICE ACT

(Mrs. CAPPS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, 1 month ago, elderly Americans were finally able to start choosing among plans to provide them prescription drug coverage. In less than a month, these benefits will go into effect. But now these seniors are expressing their outrage. The choices they have to make are so complex it was imperative that CMS get them accurate information. But instead, CMS sent out inaccurate information. In addition, they told seniors that they basically had to get their information off the Web or by calling a hotline, but delays on the hotline are enormous, and most seniors are not comfortable using the Internet.

So now they are having to make critical, complex choices that are going to affect their health care with far too little assistance. We need to act to help them. Let us not turn our backs on America's seniors. Let us give them all of 2006 to make this important choice without penalty, and let us make sure that they can make a switch if they make the wrong choice.

Let us pass the Medicare Informed Choice Act.

HURRICANE KATRINA

(Ms. WATSON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, over the last 3½ months, this Republican Congress has failed to act to meet the critical needs of Hurricane Katrina survivors. The few proposals the Republican leadership has put forward fail to go far enough in meeting the challenges of restoring the gulf coast region.

The Congress has yet to enact a clear housing plan for the survivors still living in tents and waiting for promised trailers that have not appeared. Many families may lose their rental assistance at the end of December. And economic revitalization is moving at a snail's pace, with only about 5 percent of small business disaster loan applications approved so far.

Even Republicans have begun to criticize the delay by the administration and the Republican Congress in getting assistance to the gulf coast region. Last week, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, a former Chairman of the Republican National Committee, said his State's ability to recover has been severely hampered by Congress's delay in approving more money.

This Congress must not adjourn for the year until we enact measures to address this critical need.

WAIVING POINTS OF ORDER AGAINST FURTHER CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 3010, DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 596 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 596

Resolved, That upon adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider the further conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 3010) making appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes. All points of order against the conference report and against its consideration are waived. The conference report shall be considered as read.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FOLEY). The gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Speaker, for purposes of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to my friend and colleague from California (Ms. MATSUT), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 596 is a rule waiving all points of order against the conference report accompanying H.R. 3010 and against its consideration. This rule provides that the conference report shall be considered as read.

Mr. Speaker, the underlying legislation is one of the most important measures we consider each year. The underlying legislation will fund a broad array of programs improving the health, education and lifestyle of many Americans. I would like to congratulate the chairman and ranking member of the full committee and subcommittee for their hard work on this essential spending bill.

Mr. Speaker, the future of America hinges on the success of our future generations and their ability to compete with the rest of the world. In order for our children to succeed, they must be equipped with a high-quality education. I am happy to say that since Republicans took control of Congress, funding for the Department of Education has doubled; more recently, over the last 5 years, total education spending has increased by nearly 50 percent. Our children will benefit from an improved educational system that will enhance their ability to succeed and better prepare that next generation of workers.

The fundamental root of all education is reading. As we enter the holiday season, many families will join together in reading holiday stories providing wonderful memoirs for years to come. Unfortunately, some children are not able to read at the appropriate grade level. Included in this legislation is \$1 billion for reading programs that will enable States to eliminate the reading deficit through science- and research-based reading programs.

I am also very pleased that the TRIO and GEAR UP programs are included in this all-important funding package. These programs assist low-income, first-generation college students in their transition from high school to college. This is a difficult transition for any student, but especially those who are the first in their family to attend college. We must continue to support programs like TRIO and GEAR UP so that these students will continue to flourish.

Mr. Speaker, another important responsibility we have is to ensure that our citizens have access to health care facilities and treatments. Included in this legislation is a \$66 million increase in funding for community health centers that are so vitally important across this Nation, but especially in rural States, much like my home State of West Virginia. In the last 5 years, Congress has increased funding for these critical components of our health care delivery system by 48 percent.

I am especially pleased with the increased rural health funding included in this conference report. Millions of Americans across the country, including a majority of my West Virginia constituents, are faced with drastically different health care challenges because they reside in rural areas. This conference report includes a \$90 million increase in funding for rural health programs. Included in this package are funds for the Office of Rural Health and